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## WOMAN'S WAGE AND THE SOCIAL EVIL

### RELATION OF WOMAN'S WAGE TO THE SOCIAL EVIL.

Owing to the great emphasis which had recently been given to the relation of the wage scale of women in industry to the social evil, popularly termed the "White Slave" problem, it was made the special subject for consideration at an informal conference of social workers and others who have dealt directly with the subject, at the Metropolitan Building, in New York, April 18, 1913. The consensus of opinion on the part of that voluntary group of persons was that a certain amount of injustice was being done to self-supporting women through that agitation and that there should be given to the public a statement refuting the charges made after securing the signatures of others whose experience would enable them to speak with authority. The following committee was appointed to formulate a tentative draft:

Professor Jeremiah W. Jenks, of New York University,

James Bronson Reynolds, Esq., Counsel, American Vigilance Association,

Miss Katharine Bement Davis, Supt. N. Y. State Reformatory for Women,

Henry W. Herbert, City Magistrate, Women's Night Court, New York City,

Miss Rose Sommerfeld, Supt. Clara De Hirsch Home for Working Girls, New York City,

Frederick H. Whitin, General Secretary, Committee of Fourteen, New York City,

Miss Florence M. Marshall, Principal Manhattan Trade School for Girls, New York City.

The circulation of the document resulting from their joint efforts brought helpful suggestions which were incorporated in it and the following statement was finally adopted.

"The comments made in the newspapers of late concerning vice among working girls, especially in department stores, indicate clearly that there has been a wide misconception on the part of many regarding the subject. The undersigned are of the opinion that these comments, in many cases, through lack of experience of the writers, have been grossly unjust to the working girls, and that from the widespread publicity given these mistaken views grave evils are likely to result. In fact, we believe evils have in many cases already resulted therefrom to society and even to the working girls themselves.

"The undersigned do not wish in these comments in any way to express an opinion regarding the wages paid to working girls, certainly

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not to intimate that they are too high or even sufficient. That is a question to be considered on different grounds, and our sympathy is strongly with the working girls.

"In order, however, to aid at least a little in minimizing this evil of mistaken opinion regarding working girls and to indicate in part the line that should be followed in investigations of such a question, we venture to suggest that in recent accounts in the newspapers many vital points have been ignored. Clearly any thorough investigation of the subject should include questions regarding their age, school training, mental development, heredity, occupation, hours of work, whether apprentices or regular workers; source of support, if apprentices, or if not working; whether living at home or contributing to support of the home; the use made of their wages; previous depraving influences; views regarding sex relationship of the common intimate associates of the girl; the forms of her social recreation, and it is particularly important to ascertain how money received, if at all, as the price of a girl's fall and subsequent immoral practices, was spent—whether for necessities, luxuries, or for her family.

"If such matters were covered, we should be more certain regarding the conclusions reached. Our own observation and experience would indicate that the most important contributing causes of immorality of girls are: Weakness of mind and will; individual temperament; immoral associates; lack of religious or ethical training; injurious home influences; cramped living accommodations, rendering privacy difficult; lack of industrial efficiency; idleness; unwillingness to accept available employment; love of finery and pleasure; unwholesome amusement; and inexperience, and ignorance of social temptations.

"We therefore hold that it has not been satisfactorily demonstrated that low wages are a direct cause of the loss of virtue of working girls, though our experience and observation would lead us to the opinion that low wages are at times an indirect contributing cause, but it is usually the low wage of the parent or person supporting the family, resulting in low standard of living, which includes inability to give proper training to children, as well as insufficient living accommodations and the evil social influences arising therefrom. It is our general belief that low wages of working girls are scarcely ever a direct cause of their loss of chastity."

Among the signers of this report in addition to the members of the committee named above are: Professor C. R. Henderson, of the University of Chicago; George J. Kneeland, Director of Investigation for

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the Vice Commission of Chicago, and Graham Taylor, President of the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy.

Certainly the signers of the document quoted above are aiming in the right direction. The social problem of vice, furthermore, is beset by such conditions that its successful investigation may more appropriately be entrusted to independent, patient, trained students who have time at their disposal, than to members of state legislatures, however honest their purposes.

ROBERT H. GAULT.

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